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PIONEER DAYS **OF CHARLEVOIX**

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An Address by Mrs. Albert F. Bridge
Delivered At a Meeting of the Shakespeare Study Club
At Charlevoix In 1923

PIONEER DAYS OF CHARLEVOIX

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Bridge, Albert F (Mrs)
Pioneer days of Charlevoix
(Michigan)

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If I have perceptibly aged some fifty or seventy-five years since our last meeting you must blame our Secretary as it was she who insisted that I write something about local history.

Dates and reminiscences are very detrimental to the morale of those who have passed the half century mark unless they have already reached the stage of living entirely in the past.

We allow Father Time to drag us along at his own gait oblivious of the passing milestones until something happens to cause us to look back. Then we realize how fast we have traveled and how large a part of our journey is behind us.

Years bring some distinctions however, and at present I find myself the oldest "Old Settler" having an active membership in this club. But there are at least two others on the list who came to Charlevoix as early as I, and one (Mrs. Frederick W. Mayne) now on the honorary list, who can claim priority in both years and residence. Her father having brought his family here in 1867. Nine years before my father brought us.

We came in June, 1876 and by that time the real romantic pioneer days had passed and Charlevoix was a thriving little town of about five hundred inhabitants.

It contained a sawmill, three general stores, two drug stores, a hardware store, hotel, postoffice, newspaper, four-room school-house, (only two rooms being in use) and the Methodist church under construction. Religious services including Sunday School were held in the school house.

There was a daily mail and passenger stage between here and Petoskey, the nearest railway station, and two passenger steamers, the "Fountain City" and "Idaho" running between Buffalo and Chicago stopped regularly at our dock each week usually staying two or three hours and taking on cord-wood enough to last until their return. This being the fuel used to make steam. Another steamer the "Van Raalte" running between Traverse City and Mackinac made daily stops here; one day going north and the next going south.

We also had a small steamer running on Pine Lake* to East Jordan and Boyne City obligingly stopping at any house that might flag them in. To speak of a steamer stopping at houses sounds exactly like an old-timer's yarn, but it is a true one in this case, as the pioneer homes were built on the banks of the lake, that being the only thoroughfare, if it may be called such, in the early days before the roads were cut through the woods.

I have often heard Mother and Father (Hon. and Mrs. John Nicholls) speak of the fine class of people who were here when we came, and Charlevoix pioneers have always pointed with pride to the fact that this was not a typical lumber town. There were the families; Dixon, Nettleton, Stockman, Mason, Smith, Miller, See, Carpenter, Bartholomew, Green,

* Now Lake Charlevoix.

eaton, Butters, Amslee, Dougherty, Aldrich, Washburn, Cooper, Fox, and others of like sterling qualities. Andrew B. Dougherty, our present State Attorney General, so far as I have heard, most distinguished "Old Timer" was then a school boy here.

Charlevoix was primitive of course. There were no sidewalks and the streets were paved with six inches or more of sand. This condition did not trouble us of the younger generation, but to Father who found that it involved the necessity of buying new shoes for each one of his seven children about once a month it seemed a serious drawback.

We found neither automobiles, telephones, nor electric lights, but had one landed in New York or Chicago in 1876, we would have found only horse drawn vehicles, kerosene or gas lights and boys carrying the messages. Electricity was still unharnessed and the horseless carriage considered as a joke or the fore-runner of the millennium as predicted in a crazy woman's prophecy.

Stories of the real pioneer days, however, are the interesting part of our history and some which I have gathered from a paper written by Mrs. M. J. Stockman for the Historical Society in 1914 and from articles written for the "Sentinel" some years ago by Mr. D. C. Nettleton giving a detailed account of the opening of the channels between Pine Lake and Lake Michigan will complete this paper.

The Dixon family were among the very first settlers here, coming in 1855. Both Mr. and Mrs. Dixon were graduates of Oberlin College, he being a Civil Engineer.

There was a small Mormon settlement near the mouth of the river at that time and as they were determined that no Gentiles should settle here they, having no respect for the life or property of a Gentile became a real menace to those who made the attempt.

At one time when they were unusually active, Mrs. Dixon becoming much alarmed, left her home after night-fall not daring to appear in daylight, and walked to Petoskey to secure the aid of the settlers there. As there were no roads through the woods she walked on the beach and reached her destination about daylight, weary, faint, ragged and almost shoeless but she accomplished her purpose.

At another time the Mormons here being reinforced by a number from Beaver Island, erected a gallows on the high bluff at the mouth of the river intending to hang Mr. Dixon but their plans were frustrated as one of their number secretly warned him and with the help of Indians he escaped to Northport. The Mormons then consoled themselves by hanging him in effigy. I was told by one of King Strang's sons who lived here for a time practicing law, that his mother, Strang's third wife was among the Mormons that night, but he added that he wished people knew how she came to be led into it. Evidently, although he showed no polygamous tendencies himself, his respect for his mother was not lessened by her unconventional way of living.

Mr. Dixon remained in Northport until the Mormons were driven out in 1856.

Mrs. Dixon organized the first Sunday School here holding it in her home. She also taught an Indian school near Susan Lake, walking four miles night and morning. The old log home of the Dixons' was located about where the Pere Marquette station now stands. Their land extending along the shore of Round Lake to Lake Michigan and North to Petoskey Avenue. But their home when we came here was the large square house near the Inn Hotel and our beautifully paved Dixon Avenue was an unimproved dirt road leading to their home with woods on the north side of it almost the whole distance. It was used only by the Dixon family and those who visited them.

Mr. Dixon was the first postmaster. An Indian carrying the mail on his back from Traverse City to Cheboygan following a blazed trail through the then unbroken forest. This was undoubtedly an arrangement made by the settlers as there seems to be no record of a government mail route.

During the years 1855 and 1856 four families were located on Pine Lake. The Dixon and Thompson families were here, the Horton family at Horton's Bay and the John Miller family at the head of Pine Lake now Boyne City.

Late in October 1857 the small schooner "Sonora" worked its way into Pine River and Seth F. Mason, father of A. E. Mason and Mrs. Judd Markham, with his wife and two or three small children and Mr. and Mrs. M. J. Stockman were landed on its bank. They found shelter in a two room log house, which stood in the present lumber yard north of the river.

Mrs. Stockman describes the scenery as "Woods and Water as far as the eye could reach with a few half demolished huts left by fishermen or Mormons".

The river was only about two feet deep, narrow and crooked with overhanging boughs almost reaching across. The upper river, the one we now call the Old River was also narrow, crooked and shallow and both had swift currents. At this time the land belonged to the government and the only way to obtain ownership was to settle on it, make improvements and after a certain length of time receive a government deed. The "squatters" as they were called were very loyal to each other and never interfered with another's claim.

Soon after the arrival of the Stockmans a man who had a claim on land overlooking Pine and Round Lakes, and had built a small log hut offered to surrender this claim to Mr. Stockman if he would move him and his family to Northport with his sailboat. This trade was made and a part of the land which came to them in this way was sold by Mr. Stockman in 1878 to the Charlevoix Summer Home Association.

The Belvedere as it was first built and six cottages were erected in the spring of 1879. The log house which the Stockmans built and occupied as their home for some years was located a short distance south of where the Belvedere Hotel now stands.

Mrs. Stockman says of the early days that for lights they used fish

oil in small lamps with often a strip of cotton for a wick, or perhaps they had only some fat in a saucer with a rag for a wick. They had plenty of fish to eat, but only a little fresh meat. Salt-pork being their principle meat. No butter or milk, but maple sugar and syrup were plentiful. Sail-boats and canoes were their only means of conveyance. In the winter they must walk with snow shoes. When the distance was too great for the women to walk the men drew them on hand sleighs.

Sometimes before the opening of navigation the provisions would get low. Then they would borrow and lend until all were nearly out when it would be necessary for two or three of the men to take a walk to Elk Rapids and bring back what they could on their backs. Once they crossed to Northport on the ice and brought back supplies on handsleighs.

For amusements on summer evenings they had sailing, canoeing, fishing, etc., old and young enjoying it together.

On winter evenings they would gather at some home and have recitations, spelling matches, singing, etc., usually winding up with a dance. Mr. Hugh Miller being always present with his fife, the only musical instrument in the place.

In the fall of 1861 the necessity for a school house became apparent. Accordingly a conference was called, a site selected and a day set to begin work. All turned out and worked with a will and by night the school house was ready for occupancy. It was sixteen feet square, built of rough logs chinked in with moss and mud and had a shake roof. Mrs. Stockman explains that shakes were oak staves two feet long fastened down by saplings. Split logs of basswood were used for the floor, split side up. There were three windows of six lights each, six by ten glass. Benches on three sides of the room were made of split logs hewn smooth on one side with branches cut the proper length for legs.

Mrs. Stockman was chosen as teacher with a salary of one dollar per week. There were between twenty and thirty pupils enrolled ranging in age from three to twenty years. The books brought were of all kinds and descriptions, some having been used by the parents and some by the grandparents of the children. The school week was five and one-half days or five days one week and six the next and she was seldom able to dismiss school before five o'clock because of the multiplicity of classes caused by the variety of books and ages of the children.

Mrs. Stockman relates that two or three of the mothers formed the habit of bringing their small children, the older ones being in school, and coming to school every afternoon. Whether to absorb knowledge or not she could not say, but she had a strong suspicion that it was to absorb something else as they always took their children and accompanied her home, their husbands dropping in about supper time. As soon as this process of absorption was accomplished they would all take their leave none of them ever offering to help with any part of the work. There was no public school money at this time, so the parents paid according to the number of their children in school. Probably these parents were only trying to get their money's worth.

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1894
In 1894 Mr. Dixon sold to Messrs. Fox and Rose of Northport some land on the north side of the river on which to build a dock for steamers, their purpose being to sell wood. The work was rapidly pushed during the late summer and fall but in October a severe storm washed a part of it away. Early the next spring with a force of men and teams, the first horses to be brought here, the work was again started and during the summer the dock was completed.

It was built of piles driven out into the lake. The tops of the piles being several feet above the water and planked over like a bridge. It was located just north of the present north pier, extending out into the water about nine hundred feet and was wide enough to drive on.

This was the landing place for all passenger steamers for many years and also a favorite place for the young people to stroll on summer evenings to do their star-gazing and castle-building.

Soon after the completion of the dock Messrs. Fox and Rose brought in a small stock of merchandise and opened a store, the first in Charlevoix, occupying a log building near Pine Lake for a time, while building a frame store near the dock into which they moved in the fall of 1865. They conducted a thriving business here until 1869 when they built a much larger building on Bridge Street and brought in a large stock of goods. Mr. Archibald Buttars moved his family here at that time and became a partner. This was the most important mercantile business in Charlevoix for many years as they dealt in wood, ties, posts and tanbark, as well as groceries, dry-goods, shoes, drugs and hardware. The building is now occupied by Fred Myers.

In the fall of 1865 Messrs. Fox and Rose built a boarding house which in 1867 was bought by Richard Cooper, father of Mrs. Bedford and the late Henry Cooper, christened the "Fountain City House" and Charlevoix had a hotel.

In 1866 Mr. Dixon platted the little town of Charlevoix. The original plat containing eighteen blocks and comprising all the land between the river and Antrim Street and between Round Lake and Lake Michigan except the park bordering on Lake Michigan.

In 1867 a government mail route and postoffice were established. Mr. Nelson Ainslee, Mrs. Mayne's father, being given the contract for carrying the mail between Traverse City and Charlevoix. The State road, now our M-11 was opened about that time.*

By 1867 it became apparent that the old log school house had become inadequate and the subject of a new one to take its place was agitated. The men being busy and not disposed to do anything about the matter the women took it up. They called a meeting, appointed committees and began considering ways and means to raise the necessary funds. Mrs. Stockman gives a long and interesting account of their first entertainment for this purpose, a supper and fair at which they raised seventy-five dollars. The result of their activities was of course a new school building completed the next year. So it seems that the pioneer women, although they were not allowed the right of suffrage, although they were

* Later changed to US-31.

not members of women's clubs, found it necessary to take the lead in matters of civic improvement.

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The new school house was located on the corner of State and Antrim Streets. Mr. E. H. Green being the first teacher at a salary of four dollars per week, partly cash and partly produce. Miss Lottie Ainslee (Mrs. Mayne) taught here in the summer of 1869. In 1873 a four-room building was built on the site of our present school buildings.

In the fall of 1867 Messrs. Redington and Nelson bought of Mr. Dixon the land north of the river now occupied by the Charlevoix Lumber Co. erecting a saw mill thereon, the next year Mr. O. S. Washburn coming from Wisconsin as foreman for the firm.

In 1870 this property was bought by my grandfather, Mr. George Esterly and in 1876 by my father. He enlarged and improved the mill, built the planing mill and with the help of his sons continued to operate until no more logs were available, about 1915.

In 1868 Mr. Laister, a man with apparently no family ties came to Charlevoix erected a building on the corner where the A. E. Mason business is now being conducted and brought a stock of dry goods and groceries, the second in Charlevoix. He carried on the business until December 1871, when he committed suicide. He was the first person buried in the Charlevoix cemetery.

There must have been some artists among the early pioneers of Charlevoix or they would not have wandered through the woods and selected that beautiful spot of which we are so proud. Mrs. Stockman says of it, "The cemetery was then in the rough and only partly cleared. It was reached by a road cut through the woods but not improved".

Early in the year 1869 Charlevoix County was organized, it having previously been a part of Mackinaw County. Practically simultaneous with this came the first issue of the Charlevoix Sentinel, which contains a complete account of the organization of the County and a list of officers elected. The "Sentinel" was a five column folio printed on a hand press. Willard A. Smith being proprietor, editor, printer and printer's devil.

Mr. Smith continued as proprietor and editor until his death in 1917, almost fifty years, and Charlevoix owes much to the enthusiastic booster articles which always appeared in his columns when any matter of public improvement was under discussion. With him as with the other pioneers, it was "Charlevoix first, last and always".

Another undertaking of great importance to Charlevoix which was begun in 1869 was the widening and deepening of the channels between Pine Lake and Lake Michigan.

By this time settlers were coming in quite rapidly, many soldiers coming to take homesteads at the close of the Civil War. As they must clear land in order to raise crops and must raise crops in order to live, the result was that an immense amount of the finest timber in the country was being sacrificed. All recognized the wastefulness of this course and the only remedy was the opening of the river so the surplus might be shipped out.

This was indeed an undertaking as it was necessary not only to make the channel but to protect it with piers to keep the sand from washing in. In June 1869 books were opened at the office of Redington-Nelson & Co. and subscriptions solicited to obtain funds to prosecute the work. These subscriptions were payable in money, labor or anything that could be of use in the prosecution of the work. As a matter of fact very little money was paid but the response in labor was most generous and several thousand dollars was soon subscribed by the residents of the village and county tributary to Pine Lake, the latter having been assured that the upper river as well as the lower would be made navigable. Their task was a hard one, nothing but the undaunted courage and perseverance of the pioneer could have carried them through. Time after time their work was carried away by the storms.

Mr. Nettleton says, "It was a contest of man versus the elements and the elements seemed to have a decisive advantage". Still they worked, after each disaster new plans were made and new funds raised. Finally an appropriation of sixteen sections of State swamp lands was made and with the proceeds from this they were able to secure a dredge, which arrived in July 1873. Mr. Nettleton says the entire population of the village formed a committee of reception. When the dredge had finished they had a channel thirty-five feet wide and from ten to twelve feet deep. Finally in 1876 Uncle Sam took hold of the work and made an appropriation of \$10,000.00. The work has been continued by the government until our present harbor is the result.

On July 7th, 1882 amidst the blowing of whistles, ringing of bells, the waving of handkerchiefs and the shouts of the people, the "Fountain City" steamed slowly and majestically up the river. The first large steamer to enter Round Lake. Captain Gibson, who had been stopping at the outside dock for many years, as proud to bring her in as the people were rejoiced to have him.

The work on the upper river while not causing so many discouragements as that on the lower was nevertheless a task worthy of the mettle of the pioneer.

The natural channel being long and crooked, it was thought best to make an entirely new one, our present upper channel is the result. They chose the narrowest place about 150 feet, literally pulled the trees out by the roots, worked with teams and scrapers until they had a stream through and then put the little tugs "Commodore Mit" and "Minnie Warren" to work backing their way through, their wheels throwing the sand to one side.

Mr. Nettleton says the first bridge across Pine River was made by driving small piles with a maul placing rough stringers and making a walk about four feet wide and twenty inches above the water. A few planks were left loose for the passage of canoes and small boats. The second bridge was of pile construction and had a horizontal draw some ten or twelve feet in width, operated by a winch at the approach and it took a large part of the available population of the town to operate this so a boat could pass through. The third was an iron swing bridge operated by hand, which in the development of the harbor became inadequate and

was sold to East Jordan where it is still in use. The fourth is our present bridge.*

In the fall of 1880 Mr. Dixon sold to the Chicago Club that part of his farm upon which their buildings now stand. The Club House and five or six cottages being built in the spring of 1881.

This made the resort business quite a feature in the life of Charlevoix. The Belvedere and some cottages having been built two years before. A railway became the next necessary improvement. An effort was made to interest some road in the project but this not being possible a company was formed, funds raised, towns along the most feasible route between here and Traverse City visited and persuaded to co-operate and the right of way obtained. This being done the Chicago and North Michigan Railway Co. finished the work and in 1892 Charlevoix had through trains to Chicago.

All that was left of the Dixon farm was sold to the railroad. The Inn was built and Charlevoix was launched as the most perfect little resort town in Michigan.

The pioneer days are gone and the pioneers of the older generation except one or two have passed to the other shore. Shall we not, while reviewing the work of their hands, pause to take an inward glance and ask ourselves, "Are we carrying on?" Can we point to any achievement in any way comparable with those accomplished by them and say, "This we have done?" Are we worthy of the heritage?

* *Memorial Bridge completed 1949.*



1882

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